



IRAQ FACTS AND CUSTOMS



OPERATIONS ORIENTATION BRIEFING

4th ID CHAPLAIN

**4TH Infantry Division Chaplain's
Office**

Steadfast and Loyal



HOLY DAYS, RITUALS AND CUSTOMS



Two Main Holiday Periods (based on lunar month calendar)

- Ramadan – (Id al-Fitr)
- Annual pilgrimage (Id al-Adha)

Hijrah (HIJ-rah) - Muslim New Year

Milad al-Nabi – Commemorates the birth of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (third in importance behind Ramadan and Annual pilgrimage).

Id al-Fitr – Celebration feast at the end of Ramadan

Id al-Adha – Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael (Judiasm/Isaac) where God's angel provided a ram instead.

Issues: Holiday periods are important and commanders should be aware of implications.



DO'S AND DON'TS



- Remember everything about the Qur'an (Koran) is sacred
- Arabs shake hands gently
- Use your right hand when gesturing (avoid inferring uncleanness)
- Placement of right hand over the heart after shaking hands is a sign of respect
- Placement of the right hand over the heart after serving food is a sign of offering with sincerity for women
- Kiss to the forehead, nose or right hand during a greeting is a sign of extreme respect
- Open palms toward a person expresses "Excellent."
- Never use the "A-OK" and "thumbs-up" gesture. It is an obscenity for Arabs



DO'S AND DON'TS



- Never sit with your feet up on a desk or some other piece of furniture. It is rude – Arabs consider the bottoms of your feet as the dirtiest part of the body. **Pointing or exposing** the bottoms of your feet toward an Arab is extremely insulting.
- When beckoning a person to come, all fingers wave with the palm facing downward.
- Remember – individuals will maintain or save “face” at severe cost.
- Do not ask about the women of a Arab household even in a friendly interested manner
- Receive and offer hospitality with warmth and grace.
- Dogs and pets are considered unclean.
- Allow hosts to initiate discussions topics.



DO'S AND DON'TS



Handling the Qur'an

- Only handle it with clean hands
- Keep Qur'ans out of latrines
- Cover with plastic or cloth when not in use
- Place the Qur'an on a rest or holder when sitting on the floor
- Women should not handle it during their monthly menstruation cycle



DO'S AND DON'TS



Visiting a Mosque

- Take off your shoes and leave at the entrance
- No shorts for men; women, no short or sleeveless dresses
- Do not talk loudly
- Do not walk directly in front of people praying
- Do not take pictures (especially women)
- Mosques are considered shelters for the homeless
- Do not be surprised by the lack of furniture except a carpet

This demonstrates the non-sacramental and simple of worship in Islam



DO'S AND DON'TS



- Green is the respected color in Islam – be cautious about using symbols of contention or in you face type of activity. remember that someone else has to follow you and their lives will be significantly made more difficult because of your indifference
- Stay out of discussions with locals about the treatment of women. Don't believe all you hear in the press.



PRAYER



SALAT (Prayer) – is the obligation of every sane adult and begins at puberty. It is one of the most basic and important Pillars of Islam – hence the requirement to pray 5 times each day.



FUNERAL RITES



- Imam at local mosque informed as soon as possible
- Family members of the same sex wash the body
- Deceased is swathed in a simple white cotton sheet or shroud
- Body placed in an unlined coffin
- Burial, as far as possible, should occur on the day of the death
- Body is buried in the grave with the head facing Mecca
- If any question occurs when working with locals contact Civil Affairs for guidance.

Markers are simple headstones – Male (ball on top of a pole)
Females (a simple flat board) It is forbidden to walk, sit or lean on, or build structures upon graves.



ISLAM



Originally women attended prayers in the mosque.

purdah (seclusion) became wide spread with end result being that most women worship in the privacy of their own homes

Hajj (Pilgrimage) – required once in a life time of all Muslims who have the physical and financial ability

SHIA Muslims

- Holy cities – Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn and Samarra are the most sacred sites for Shia in Iraq
- Pilgrimage to Karbala occurs twice yearly – commemorates the death of Imam Hussein.
- Iraqi officials have not allowed Iraqis to go on the Hajj – could be a plus if coalition commanders allow it.



ISLAM



Subjects likely to incite a response

1. Denigrating Islam or its practices; using the name of God (Allah) his Prophet (Muhammad) in profane expression
2. Use of “Jesus Christ” in profanity will cause a reaction. Jesus is considered a great prophet – to defame a prophet is to defame the one who sent the prophet, God (Allah) Soldiers who cannot contain their profanity should be removed from a situation/position where they can cause diplomatic embarrassment to the command.



ISLAM



LEADERSHIP

Sunni Islam – recognize the legitimacy of the political leader in the Muslim community. As long as that leader supports the worship services and Islamic practices aren't prohibited, Sunnis will be hesitant to resist or go against the ruler.

Shia Islam – Many of the senior Shia leaders have been Arrested, imprisoned and/or killed. Leadership lies in confusion. Great respect for religious leaders; looking for the return of The Mahdi who will again combine leadership of both political and the religious systems. They don't consider the political leader as a great person of faith. Like the Sunni, as long as the leader supports faith, even though a scoundrel, they will support his leadership.



ISLAMIC TOLERATION

- Assyrians are permitted to convert to Islam
 - Muslims are forbidden to convert to Christianity
 - Power Distribution/Government policy
 - Sunni Muslims – Share power with the religious group.
- Saddam uses religious imagery (building Mosques) to promote/legitimatize his rule
- Shi Muslims – Contain or assimilate the religious group.
 - Christians – Assimilate the group (treated as spies) –
Eastern rite Roman Catholic; Apostolic Assyrian-Nestorian;
Syriac Orthodox – Assyrians and Chaldeans have historic roots to the earliest Christian communities.
 - Yazidiz – Assimilate the group (Sinjar mountains W. of Mosul)
 - Kurdish Sunnis – Stamp out the group!